From welfare to correction: a review of changing discourses of secure accommodation

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Introduction

Secure accommodation refers to locked facilities within the child care system. In England the term includes local authority secure children's homes and Secure Training Centres and in Scotland, a more unitary system of secure units run by local authority or voluntary-sector providers. In a climate of heightened awareness of youth crime, such provision can be seen in the public mind and increasingly in political discourse, as a response to youth offending. However, while it does work with young offenders, its purposes and regulations are rooted in a human rights imperative to limit rather than facilitate the restriction of young people's liberty. Secure units have their origins in welfare-oriented child care philosophies rather than in the justice system. Many young people placed there have needs that have been difficult to address elsewhere but they do not fit the profile of the 'persistent offender', which has driven the expansion of provision. The commitment to expanding such an expensive resource, especially one with a long history of uncertainty around its purpose and effectiveness (Millham, Bullock and Hosie, 1978), reflects a hardening ideology towards young people who offend (Goldson 2000) and misconceived ideas about what secure accommodation can realistically do.

This article traces the history of secure accommodation, identifying the expansion of provision over the past 40 years. It locates this expansion within changing public and professional discourses around young people and crime. It goes on to consider what secure accommodation might realistically offer young people within a continuum of child care provision. The article is written from a Scottish perspective, and while there are differences in the legal framework and structure of the sector in Scotland and England, the political and professional trends are sufficiently similar to be of interest to professionals in both jurisdiction.

History of secure accommodation

Secure accommodation as a mode of intervention with troubled young people began to emerge slowly in the 1960s. It emerged within the residential child care sector, as special units or blocks attached to Approved Schools, which until that point had been the main provision for children brought before the courts, including both those who offended and those deemed to be in need of care and protection. The units were originally referred to as 'closed blocks', with bars on the windows and fences round the perimeter, where children could not move freely because they were under lock and key. The *need* for 'closed blocks' within the Approved School system, to better deal with especially troublesome or persistently absconding children, had been under discussion from the early 1950s (Millham, Bullock and Hosie, 1978). Therefore although the concept, and design, of these new units, drew on ideas from the prison system, they were part of the child care system. As such they have been strongly rehabilitative and therapeutic in intent rather than primarily punitive. They were also intended, from their inception, to cater not only for offenders, but also for those

whose behaviour was a risk to themselves. As such, there was a complexity and ambiguity to their function from the outset (Rose, 2002; Harris and Timms, 1993). This ambiguity is well reflected in the full title of Harris and Timm's work, *Secure accommodation in child care: between hospital and prison or thereabouts*.

As Millham Bullock & Hosie note:

> *In the nineteenth century, security was viewed as largely punitive and retributive but the philosophy seemed to have changed considerably by the 1960s when the first secure units in the child-care system were opened. Today, any long-term security of adolescents is justified in terms of a treatment programme rather than in punitive terms.* (1978: 1)

There was an undoubted treatment orientation in many of the early secure units. Some based their programmes around psychodynamic principles, others along behavioural lines. In Scotland, the List D Schools Psychological Service, which was established in the early 1970s, provided consultancy to the emerging secure units.

The need for secure provision arose from the problem of absconding on the one hand, and on the other as a response to the small number of exceptionally aggressive or challenging boys who disrupted the regime in the Approved Schools. Furthermore from the late fifties the Approved School system came under increasing pressure to demonstrate its effectiveness amidst public and political concern about rising rates of delinquency and number of young offenders in the prison system (Millham, Hosie and Bullock, 1978). The trigger for establishing secure units was a serious disturbance at Carlton Approved School in Bedfordshire. A subsequent Home Office inquiry recommended 'closed units' (Durand, 1959).

The first unit was actually opened in Scotland in 1962 with 25 places for boys attached to an existing Approved School, Rossie Farm, near Montrose (Smith and Milligan, 2005). In England the first secure units were designated Regional Special Units and opened at Kingswood School in Bristol in 1964, then at Redhill in Surrey in 1965 and Redbank in Lancashire in 1966.

The increasing use of secure accommodation

By the early 1970s Approved Schools had been renamed List D Schools in Scotland, and Community Homes with Education (CHEs) in England. In England the 1970s were a confusing era in terms of 'youth justice' following the Children and Young Persons Act (1969) with its liberal intention to divert many more young people away from the juvenile courts. On the one hand many judges and police felt that the supervision provided by the new social service departments was inadequate. A result was more children being referred to the courts and more care orders imposed. On the other hand there was considerable scepticism in the social service departments about what Approved Schools could achieve with young offenders. Contemporary research encouraged minimum intervention and the adoption of *Intermediate Treatment* approaches (Thorpe et al., 1980). The net result was that in the period from the mid-1970s to the late 1980s most CHEs were closed, but the secure units attached to some of them remained. Thus a trend was established which saw the steady growth of

secure accommodation at the same time as open (non-secure) residential provision declined.

In Scotland the reduction in the List D school sector was not so marked. Since 1986 they have simply been referred to as 'residential schools', and they continue to play a significant role in the residential sector However, just as in England, the number of secure places increased while the number of non-secure places gradually declined. In Scotland over the past 40 years the number of secure beds doubled in the 1970s, trebled in the 1980s and quadrupled in the 1990s. This represented a significant change in the ratios of open to secure beds in the residential school system. According to Stewart and Tutt:

> *In the 1960s there were 25 secure beds and 1700 open beds, a ratio of 1:68, by 1981 the List D schools had 49 secure places and 1200 open (1:25); by 1984 there were 69 secure places to an overall population of 700 (1:10), and some Scottish children were also placed in secure institutions in England.* (Stewart and Tutt, 1987: 66)

The current expansion of the Scottish 'secure estate' from 96 to 125 beds will bring this ratio to something nearer 1: 5 or 6. Millham and his colleagues noted in 1978 that, '*each year more children endure a period under lock and key than at any time since they were taken out of prison by the Children's Charter of 1908*' (Millham, Bullock and Hosie, 1978: 1). This trend has continued ever since.

The development of Regulations and Criteria governing the use of secure accommodation

Initially during the 1960s and 70s secure placement happened mainly by administrative transfer of difficult children within the Approved School system and with little legal rigour attached to the process. As numbers grew and notions of children's rights strengthened during the 1970s this became an unacceptable situation, which eventually led in the early 1980s to the development of a proper statutory framework governing the use of secure accommodation.

In response to professional unease about the expansion of the secure estate, and prompted by concerns that the UK might be in breach of the European Convention on Human Rights – a key principle being that a person can only be deprived of their liberty after due process of law – criteria for the use of secure accommodation were introduced in England under the Criminal Justice Act (1982). In Scotland the equivalent legislation was appended to the Health and Social Services and Social Security Adjudications Act (HASSASSAA) 1983.

The criteria in the two countries were largely similar. The Scottish version laid out that:
> *he (sic) has a history of absconding and he is likely to abscond unless he is kept in secure accommodation and if he absconds, it is likely that his physical, mental or moral welfare will be at risk:*
> *or*
> *he is likely to injure himself or other persons unless he is kept in secure accommodation.*

Whichever of these criteria were met, the Scottish legislation stipulated that the use of secure accommodation also had to be 'in the best interests' of any child so placed.

The legislation was supported by a Code of Practice, which stressed that the use of secure accommodation for children be seen as an exceptional measure, that only those children who genuinely needed it were placed there and that placement should be restricted to the minimum time necessary to meet the child's needs. It was also to be seen in the context of an appropriate child care framework (Social Work Services Group, 1985, section 3.5).

The wording and spirit of the secure child care legislation places it firmly within a human rights concern to restrict numbers of young people deprived of their liberty. It also locates secure accommodation within the continuum of child welfare services rather than ascribing to it a particular role in responding to youth offending. Indeed the criteria for placing a child or young person in secure accommodation make no reference to offending as such and it might be argued that the only type of offence that would bring young people into consideration for placement would be crimes of violence against other persons or offences such as car theft that might place a youngster themselves (as well as others) at risk. It is difficult to argue that the kind of youth crime and disorder that is the focus of current government initiatives would meet the criteria for secure accommodation.

The nature of the criteria entails that secure accommodation has historically catered for a wide range of troubled youngsters. As well as offenders it has dealt with those who self-harm, those outwith any adult control (who may or may not be offending) and those who have been abused. O'Neill (2001) highlights the gendered dimension of secure accommodation in the sense that girls are often locked up primarily because they are at risk of sexual exploitation.

The beginnings of change

In England, the punitive public response to the murder of 2-year old James Bulger by two 10-year old boys was the catalyst for changing the conceptualisation of secure accommodation away from its welfare roots. Following this, a new type of secure provision, the Secure Training Centre (STC), was established in the late 1990s. STCs are 40-bed units for 12-15 year olds, run by the private sector. While local authority secure units continue to take a mixture of young people whose disruptive behaviour poses a threat to others, and those who are at risk of self-harm, STCs only take children who have offended and received Detention and Training Orders from the Youth Courts, a disposal created by the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

According to Rose STCs 'combine the security features of prison service establishments with the standards of residential accommodation and staffing approaches of the local authority secure units (2002: 191).' They are however significantly cheaper than the local authority secure units and it is clear that the Youth Justice Board for England and Wales, established in 1998 is willing to reduce the use of secure care facilities and expand the number of places they buy from the STC sector (Youth Justice Board, 2004).

Current numbers

There is much concern about the overall numbers of children in various forms of secure accommodation, compared to other developed countries. It is very difficult to make exact comparisons given different types of institutions and different legal systems in the various jurisdictions that make up the UK. John Pitts, quoting figures from NACRO, argues:

> *It appears that by 2003 the level of child and youth incarceration in England and Wales vis-à-vis the under 18 population as a whole was four times that of France, ten times that of Spain and one hundred times that of Finland.*
> (Pitts, 2005: 173).

In Scotland it may appear that the situation is even worse given, as we show below, that the number of children held in secure accommodation is much higher than in England. However research into numbers in Young Offender Institutions (YOIs) indicates that England incarcerates many more boys under 16 in YOIs than does Scotland. Overall our conclusions suggest that, taking all forms of secure accommodation together, England and Scotland actually lock up similar numbers (proportionate to population).

The population of Scotland at just over 5m is approximately one-tenth of that of England. In England in 2005 there were 270 places in the four Secure Training Centres plus 320 in local authority secure children's homes (LASCHs) (Youth Justice Board , 2004), and also around 2,500 places for under 18s in prison service establishments; Young Offenders Institutions (YOIs). Scotland has no equivalent of the Secure Training Centre, and all of the secure places for under 16s are in local authority or voluntary sector secure units. The current number of places in these units is 96 with plans to increase this to 125.

Provision for under 16s

England	LASCH = 320 STC = 270	Total = 510
Scotland	LASCH equivalent = 96	Total = 96

Scotland thus appears to 'lock up' nearly twice as many children under 16 than even England, England's population being 10 times that of Scotland.

However, as the figures below show, Scotland locks up far fewer 16 and 17 year olds in YOIs than England. The reason for this is that in Scotland there has been a sustained effort to keep all under 16s out of YOIs, whereas in England large numbers of 15 year old *boys* are held in YOIs. There has, however, been an attempt to keep all 15 and 16 year old *girls* out of YOIs.

> **Under 18s in YOIs**
> England: 2700 places for 15, 16 and 17 year olds in YOIs. (Source: YJB 2004)
> Scotland: 170 (38, 16-year olds, and 132 17-year olds) in YOIs. (Scottish Prison Service, 2003).

Our view is that when all these figures are gathered together that it is possible to claim that Scotland locks up a similar number of children under 18 to England; Scotland has proportionately *more* in local authority secure care but *fewer* 15 and 16 year olds in YOIs.

Despite an impression created by politicians and some professionals (in the police or children's hearings system for instance), demand for secure accommodation in Scotland has remained static since the late 1990s. What is happening is that children are staying longer rather than more of them needing this type of care. This may be attributable to secure units taking fewer risks in releasing youngsters and to extended periods of time in security to complete particular programmed interventions.

The changing discourse on youth crime

The expansion of secure accommodation needs to be understood against a backdrop of increasing populism and 'toughness' in relation to criminal justice and when welfare oriented systems of youth justice have come under sustained attack. Waterhouse and McGhee (2004) locate this shift within wider trends towards neo-liberal government across the developed world and a corresponding emphasis on individual as opposed to social responsibility. In such a political climate, managerial imperatives and a desire to find technical solutions to complex social problems predominate over wider social and moral considerations (Smith and McNeill 2005, Ruch 2005).

The concern for effectiveness in public services is manifest in the 'what works' zeitgeist that has come to dominate criminal justice social work in the past decade. In the 1970s and 80s a catchphrase of social work with offenders was 'nothing works,' suggesting that offenders did not, as a rule, respond well to social work (McGuire 1995). Therefore, a conscious policy of minimal intervention might actually be the best approach. Most young people would grow out of their offending; some would not. However, over the course of the 1980s and 90s a new literature emerged, indicating that some interventions were in fact more effective than others in helping offenders turn their behaviours around (McGuire, 1995). These findings have been developed under the umbrella of 'what works', reflecting a quest for empirically tested programmes of intervention to address offending.

Although the 'what works' agenda can be promoted as a pragmatic search for evidence of effectiveness, ideological factors impinge on the use of such 'evidence' within the broader context of the increasing politicisation of youth crime (McNeill 2004). This wider political climate is manifest in a 'new youth justice' with an unambiguously 'correctional' focus. The focus of intervention in relation to young offenders has shifted unmistakably from needs to deeds. Goldson (2002) claims that we increasingly 'responsibilise' and 'adulterise' young people, shifting our concern as a society away from their welfare needs to the behavioural manifestations of these.

Scotland seemed to be resisting this correctional momentum until Jack McConnell took over as First Minister in 2002. It quickly followed suit. The 'Ten Point Action Plan on Youth Crime' (Scottish Executive 2002) included a range of measures to tackle persistent offending and non-criminal anti-social behaviour: specialist fast-track children's hearings (subsequently discontinued after an evaluation concluded

that it was not effective in reducing re-offending), provision for the use of Anti-Social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs), a civil measure, which does not require criminal conviction In relation to secure accommodation, the Executive's strategy includes an expansion from 96 to 125 places (Scottish Executive 2002b). The National Standards for Youth Justice (2002c) set an objective to 'target the use of secure accommodation appropriately and ensure it is effective in reducing offending behaviour.' (Objective 5), despite the fact that the criteria for placement do not directly mention offending. The Antisocial Behaviour etc. (Scotland) Act (2004) paved the way for the electronic 'tagging' of young people as an alternative to secure accommodation. However, such initiatives are being introduced alongside the expansion of secure accommodation rather than as a direct alternative. And because young people who fail to cooperate with the 'tag' can be placed in secure accommodation, this legislation risks further widening the net of those young people locked up.

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The change in the discourse of secure accommodation from welfare to justice is evident in structural changes in the Scottish Executive where secure accommodation is now administered by the Justice Department, whilst other areas of residential child care remain within the Education Department. Recently introduced Youth Justice Standards (2002) speak the language of criminal justice, demanding that units conduct risk assessments using tools developed and oriented towards youth offending rather than any wider conception of children's needs.

The 'what works' agenda has been internalised by many practitioners in youth justice and assumes a 'taken for granted' status. Audit Scotland (2002) for instance recommend that 'more programmes be developed, designed around the 'what works' principles and based on evaluations of good practice, as though such assumptions were clear-cut and uncontested. Within the 'what works' discourse, cognitive behavioural approaches are currently considered to be the most effective in tackling offending behaviour. The shift in emphasis from welfare to correction has particular implications for the wider child care system and for practice in secure units.

Implications of the changing discourse

On the wider system

The expansion of the secure estate is premised on a failure to understand the laws of supply and demand in relation to secure accommodation and its place in the wider continuum of services for young people. Petrie (1980), Harris and Timms (1993), Bullock, Little and Millham (1995) all point to the fact that secure accommodation can only be understood in terms of its relationship with the wider child care system. As Kendrick and Fraser point out, 'the demand for security reflects the requirements of inadequate, open institutions and community services rather than the needs of difficult children.' (1992: 105)

Children's homes that are badly managed, poorly resourced or inadequately supported are likely to fuel demand to lock up young people. Heron and Chakrabarti (2002) highlight cultures in children's homes, where disempowered staff groups are charged to look after some of society's most difficult youngsters. It should come as little surprise then that research into the fast track children's hearings pilot (Scottish

Executive 2003) indicates that many of those young people labelled 'persistent young offenders' achieve that status whilst in residential care. Unless and until problems of care and control in children's homes are adequately addressed they will continue to create candidates for secure accommodation. Indeed this tendency may be fuelled by the assumption that secure units have some superior expertise in working with young offenders. That role will increasingly be put at their door rather than being owned throughout the system. The expansion of secure accommodation is not then a simple response to increasing demand. It, in fact, generates that demand, thus contributing to the ratios of young people in secure and open settings already alluded to. We have argued elsewhere that the money devoted to the expansion of secure accommodation could be better invested in the open school and local authority unit sector to improve the capacity and stability of placements (Smith and Milligan, 2005).

Effects on practice

When the political discourse demands toughness in addressing offending behaviour then secure units, which depend on local and central government patronage, are pushed towards particular ways of working. This is manifest in many secure units in the proliferation of 'programmed' interventions based on 'what works' principles, addressing particular problematic behaviours such as cognitive skills, victim empathy, anger management or sexual aggression.

Cognitive behavioural approaches are not however unproblematic. A number of questions can be raised around them at both philosophical and practical levels. Philosophically, such approaches are not value neutral. In assuming that criminal behaviour is a consequence of individual cognitive deficit they fail to accord sufficient weight to structural factors that are implicated in offending. The impact of wider social factors is glaringly apparent from the backgrounds of those children referred to the children's hearings system. Significant proportions of them (over half in some variables) experienced a range of physical and/or mental health difficulties, abuse, parents with mental health problems, or families in which drug or alcohol abuse was a feature (Scottish Children's Reporters Administration, 2004).

There are practical problems too with current 'what works' approaches to practice in secure accommodation. The roots of such programmes are in work with adult offenders. Their effectiveness with young offenders is questionable (Pitts 2001). Stevens (2004) argues that cognitive behavioural approaches to practice in residential child care cannot be considered in isolation from the broader care experience of young people. Another major problem with the pursuit of technical solutions to youth offending is the 'wash-out' effect (McIvor, 2004). Lessons learned or improvements made whilst undergoing programmed interventions are very quickly lost once a young person leaves the programme and returns to a situation that remains largely unchanged.

Goldson (2002b) identifies a further problem in attempts to utilise programmed interventions in secure accommodation. He highlights the gulf between a rhetoric of treatment and a reality of containment. This is perhaps inevitable in secure settings where response to crisis is a feature of the daily experience and where staffing shortages or competing demands on staff can impede attempts to bring a greater structure to programmes. Additionally, many staff do not feel adequately equipped to

work with the kind of programmed interventions secure units are under pressure to adopt. Despite this, many secure units insist that they need to hold onto young people for minimum periods of time for them to complete programmed interventions. This creates a tension between the perceived requirement for a minimum treatment period and the legal imperative to lock up children for the shortest possible time. 'Treatment', for what it is worth, thus contributes to longer periods of incarceration, as previously alluded to.

Conceptualising secure accommodation

The trouble with dominant views of secure accommodation as a response to youth offending is that such a conception of its role fails to acknowledge the inevitable complexity of the resource. This is perhaps not surprising. Fulcher and Ainsworth (1985) note that:

> *Facilities which seek to transcend or overlap boundaries, and in that respect respond to a broader conception of children's developmental needs, are invariably the most controversial programmes. ...strong pressure (is) exerted... to concentrate on a single purpose... (p.8)*

The fundamental ambiguity of the secure sector is recognised by Harris and Timms (1993) when they describe it as operating 'between hospital and prison or thereabouts'.

> *(It) is both incarceration and an alternative to incarceration, a form of control imposed so that care can be given. (p.4)*

For Rose the sector is similarly marked by complexity:

> *Their specific functions place them right at the heart of the ambivalence ... in the apparently conflicting aims of the system: providing acceptable levels of social control and identifying and meeting social need. (Rose, 2002: 26)*

Although the secure estate is more diverse in England than in Scotland, with Secure Treatment Centres, secure psychiatric provision and greater use of YOIs, the backgrounds and needs of children are very similar, irrespective of what part of the system they are in. As Rose puts it,

> *... the population of young offenders in secure training centres and Young Offender Institutions also presents along a broad continuum of similar needs to those placed in local authority secure units, and the development of effective programmes for their care, management, education and treatment has to take into account their diverse histories and experiences. Many of these young people have mental health problems and their experience of adults throughout their young lives has been seriously distorted through ill-treatment and abuse. (2002: 26)*

If secure accommodation is to offer a worthwhile placement option for young people it needs to move away from pursuit of 'quick-fix' solutions to youth offending. Conceptually, it needs to consider the needs of 'the whole child' in all their

complexity. This places it at the interface of health services (including mental health), psychological services, education, social work and criminal justice. Despite government injunctions on professionals to 'work together' the fact that the youth crime and disorder rhetoric is so powerful, is likely to take secure accommodation in the particular direction of responding to offending, with a corresponding diminution of its welfare role.

Possibilities for secure accommodation: From 'what works' to 'who works'

Whilst critical of current directions in secure accommodation policy and practice, we do believe it has an important role in working with troubled young people. Where young people have committed serious offences or where there is an immediate threat to their wellbeing, it is the appropriate intervention. We would go so far as to suggest that most placements can provide positive experiences for young people, but only if we re-appraise what we expect from the use of secure accommodation.

The notion of programme

In recent years the notion of programme has been used to describe specific proprietary interventions targeted at particular difficulties, such as anger management, cognitive skills or offending. However, the term can have a variety of different meanings in residential childcare (Fulcher, 2004). A unit's programme incorporates everything that informs the way it works with young people, from its philosophy and ethos through to the particular interventions it has developed.

The primary task of secure accommodation is to put some structure around young people whose lives have been out of control. This is done through the physical confines of the building but also through the rhythms and routines of care and through exposure to caring and authoritative adults. An appropriate 'therapeutic milieu' in any residential establishment is the primary instrument of change (Smith 2005). There may then be a need to address specific problems. Some of this may involve a 'first-aid' type role such as ensuring appropriate medical and dental treatment. Other aspects of intervention may involve pieces of work around specific difficulties such as offending, self-harm or drugs/alcohol misuse.

'Programme' therefore includes everyday 'lifespace' experiences and activities or in-house interventions carried out by keyworkers or others. It may also pull in professionals with particular areas of expertise. It is essential that it provides a holistic response to the range of a young person's needs, rather than focussing on the single purpose of responding to offending.

Encouraging desistance

Recent perspectives in criminal justice social work begin to challenge the reliance on the kind of programmed interventions that have come to dominate contemporary practice. Shifting the focus of research and practice away from persistent offenders, towards identifying the factors implicated in the process by which young people desist from offending offers alternative perspectives on how best to work with them. Desistance is linked with age and maturity, life transitions and social bonds and with subjective narratives (McNeill and Batchelor 2004). Narrative approaches are

beginning to achieve a greater prominence in a number of areas of social work practice (Healy 2005, Ruch 2005). These may provide opportunities to support desistance through the appropriate use of professional relationships.

The helping relationship

Batchelor and McNeill (2004) highlight the importance of the young person-worker relationship in encouraging desistance. McNeill et al. go so far as to re-frame the phraseology away from the current focus on 'what works' to incorporate a concern about 'who works', arguing that that 'practice skills in general and relationship skills in particular are at least as critical in reducing re-offending as programme content.' (2000: 5). The sense of someone believing in them can provide young people with a sense that they are worthwhile and redeemable. Interestingly, if desistance is linked to an ability to tell one's story in a different way then the current focus on constantly addressing young people's pasts in a variety of 'what works' programmes may merely 'stick' them in that time and place, and inhibit their abilities to develop alternative identities that don't include offending.

Phelan (2001) suggests that residential child care can provide a 'free place' or an 'experience gap' where young people can feel safe and unburdened by past experiences and self-defeating beliefs. In this space they can encounter new and different ways of being. They can then begin to 'experience themselves in a new way, one that begins to weave together a personal story that includes competence, trustworthiness, happiness and, probably most importantly, hope' (Steckley 2005). The presence of meaningful professional relationships can facilitate this process.

The importance of relational factors in helping people change has a particular resonance in secure accommodation. The intimacy of the setting provides fertile ground for relationship building. Whilst research struggles to identify the effectiveness of structured programmed work in secure accommodation it consistently identifies the strength of relationships built up between staff and young people (Kelly and Littlewood 1985). One of the problems that has faced residential child care staff over the years is that, in the push to be seen to be doing 'work' with young people they can fail to acknowledge or develop the potential of the therapeutic relationship as an agent of change.

Relationship, of course, is a term that is open to accusations of fuzziness in social work practice. In a quest for professional credibility it can be tempting for social workers and related professionals to look for more scientific and measurable methods of intervention. However, the need to move beyond outcome-focussed interventions towards a greater awareness of process in facilitating change is supported by research into psychotherapy outcomes:

> *relationship factors (the strength of the alliance that develops between the youth and the worker; built upon perceived empathy, acceptance, warmth, trust and self-expression and defined by the youth as a helpful connection) and the ability of workers to work positively with the clients' ways of understanding themselves and others, account for 70% of behaviour change (Clark 2001). Two other factors, hope and expectancy that change will occur, account for 15% of behaviour change (and also depend on a positive*

relationship between worker and youth); while intervention model and technique account for only 15%. Fundamental to any prevention or intervention that has a chance of success, is a strong positive relationship.
(Nicholson and Artz 2003: 41-42)

Recent writing on criminal justice helps us better identify what is involved in appropriate helping relationships. They

involve the worker being open and honest, empathetic, able to challenge rationalisations, non-blaming, optimistic, able to articulate the client's and family members' feelings and problems, using appropriate self-disclosure and humour. (HMSO, 1995; Shulman, 1991; Trotter, 1999).
(Batchelor & McNeill, 2005: 171)

Staff as transition workers

The Youth Justice National Standards (Scottish Executive, 2002c) require that young people in secure accommodation have an aftercare plan. Providing positive relationships and experiences for young people whilst they are in secure accommodation is not enough. In the absence of the work done in secure accommodation reaching out into families, communities and other resource systems any progress made in security is likely to fall prey to the 'wash-out effect' once young people move on. Staff in secure settings might usefully be considered as 'transition workers'.

One of the advantages of the proposed expansion of the secure estate in Scotland is the fact that the new units are located on the 'campus' of residential schools. This should enable movement from secure to open residential settings whilst allowing relationships formed in security to be maintained.

Staff in secure units also have to develop skills in working with families. Traditionally, placement in secure accommodation might have been seen as confirmation of family relationships having broken down or indeed being implicated in the need for security. Families could be identified as a part of the problem for young people. Secure accommodation can indeed provide some needed respite for fractious family situations. However, 87% of children in residential child care will at some point return to their families of origin (Bullock, Little and Millham 1995), apart from those who 'age out' of the system as 'care-leavers'. Children generally perform better socially, emotionally and educationally when family connections are preserved. Maintaining contact with families is especially important in relation to supporting young people's desistance from offending behaviour. In the above areas there are obvious spaces for those who work with young people in secure accommodation to lay claim to the centrality of whole child, welfare oriented approaches. Indeed, policy initiatives such as the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* (DoH, 2003) push practitioners in the direction of multi-disciplinary working, which moves beyond a focus on the school to a wider concern with the needs of the whole child in their communities. However, as noted above this is taking place in the midst of political rhetoric which is hardening in relation to those children and young people who offend, risking the emergence (or re-emergence in historical terms) of a deserving/undeserving bifurcation of offenders and non-offenders. Given the

similarity in the underlying needs of both groups, such a stance is intellectually and, we would argue, morally unsustainable. It is up to practitioners to resist such false dichotomies and for the range of professionals from health, education and social work to work together to maintain a 'whole child' approach and to do so within a broadly welfare oriented context.

Conclusion

Secure accommodation has its roots in a desire to limit the number of young people locked up through legislative imperatives to ensure that it was used as an exceptional measure, only for those young people who needed it and for the shortest possible time. It has its roots too in a wider welfare approach to dealing with children who get into trouble.

Developments in recent years have seen it reconfigured as a response to youth crime. Security is increasingly justified in terms of outcome oriented treatment programmes. The desire to be seen to be tough on youth crime can however take precedence over effectiveness. There is scant evidence that the kind of programmes secure units are expected to provide have any long-term beneficial effects or in many instances whether they are even carried through.

Yet secure accommodation might be in a position to offer powerful opportunities to help young people change their behaviours. This will most likely happen through the strength and purposeful use of the relationships that can be established in the setting. To sustain any change, relationships built in secure accommodation need to be used to work with young people in wider community contexts and to smooth their transition to other settings. This is perhaps where any realistic role for secure accommodation lies. It is questionable whether all this is tough enough for current political imperatives, although we argue that there are spaces created within the emerging literature on youth crime for practitioners to assert and develop such a role.

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